



**To: The Honorable Beth Bye, Senate Chair  
The Honorable Roberta Willis, House Chair  
The Honorable Toni Boucher, Senate Ranking  
The Honorable Timothy LeGeyt, House Ranking  
Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

**From: Louise S. Berry, Chair, Board of Trustees**

**Re: Higher Education and Employment Advancement Public Hearing  
*S.B.1011, AN ACT CONCERNING A REORGANIZATION OF CONNECTICUT'S  
SYSTEM OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION***

**Date: March 10, 2011**

Good morning Senator Bye and Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

I'm Louise Berry, Chair of the Board of Trustees for Community Colleges, a position I've held since 2004. I've served on the Board since 1991 and was preceded on the Board by my husband. We were both among the community founders of Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson.

One of the most important things I have come to understand over the years is that Community Colleges are different. They are different from one another and from region to region. They are different because community college students are different, and the regions of the state that they serve are different. Our Board of Trustees appreciates those differences and understands that we need all students to be educated and engaged in our economy as productive, working, taxpaying citizens.

To achieve this goal, we understand that higher education must be affordable:

Of the 58,253 students that came to our college in Fall 2010, approximately 25,000 received Pell grants.

We maintain tuition and fees at the lowest possible levels and we make financial aid widely available through a tuition set aside, unique among public institutions nationwide, and through a streamlined technology solution that packages and awards aid to increasing numbers of students each year. There has been a 169% increase in aid applications since 2000-01.

Community Colleges are the entry point for higher education in Connecticut. If students cannot afford to go to a community college, they will be shut out of higher education at precisely the time that higher education is most needed. By 2018, sixty-three percent of jobs in the U.S. will require education beyond high school; in CT that number jumps to 65 percent. Where will students get the education they need to qualify for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs in Connecticut if it's not at Community Colleges?

The Board understands that higher education must be accessible:

We offer programs in every region of the state so that higher education is geographically accessible and responsive to business and community needs that vary from region to region. And we provide extensive student support services which are continuously improved by our participation in national, grant-funded student success initiatives such as Achieving the Dream and the Gates Foundation Developmental Education Initiative. These services and programs help students to find not just access but success as well, so that more students graduate with the skills needed for employment in Connecticut's Knowledge Economy.

I've been an educator for over 40 years and I can assure you that students are different today than they were 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago. Nearly 70% of the students that enroll in degree programs at our colleges are not adequately prepared to succeed at college level work. They need basic skills in reading, writing and math, but they also need the new basic skills. They need to use information and communication technologies, and they need to understand and have access to education in specific job-related technologies. They need the support offered by instructional technology, on-line resources, state of the art equipment and facilities so that they will be prepared to meet the requirements of the State's employers.

These needs are particularly critical for those students who are underprepared and disadvantaged. Community Colleges serve over two-thirds of the minority undergraduates enrolled in public higher education in Connecticut. Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the United States between its majority students and their minority cohorts. Helping these students to reach their academic goals and to graduate is essential to produce more graduates for Connecticut in order to attract and retain business investment that will create jobs. And so our Board has committed to providing the services that students need and employers demand, from developmental education and career programs to the latest information and technology resources.

We are very concerned about the budget proposed for the Community Colleges and our ability to preserve essential programs and services, but we are also very concerned about the proposal to reorganize higher education contained in SB 1011. We believe that this reorganization will diminish the Board's ability to respond to the different needs of students and businesses throughout the state.

We believe a single, high level Board of Regents with expansive responsibilities and a broad scope that involves oversight for both universities and colleges and their divergent priorities will lose the focus and responsiveness that our Community College Board of Trustees has demonstrated. Instead our Board of Trustees has taken a position urging the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for higher education that would give thoughtful consideration to governance structure, the state's goals for higher education, the different missions of the constituent units, and primarily to the differences among Connecticut's students and how they are best served.

I'd like to introduce Trustee Caroline McKenna, Senior Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Counsel for the Eastern Connecticut Health Network, Inc., and Chair of the Board's Academic Policies and Student Affairs Committee.